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ABSTRACT

Racial issues such as busing and affirmative action are not supported by most black people despite contrary insinuations by the media. Court ordered busing was not implicit in the 1954 Supreme Court decision which struck down state-imposed segregation. As a result we now have a situation that goes counter to the intent of the original decision. The grand delusion of contemporary liberals is that they have both the right and ability to move fellow creatures around like blocks of wood, in effect denying other peoples' humanity. A similar approach to human problems is applied in the labor market in the Federal affirmative action program. Affirmative action quotas are supposed to compensate minorities and women for past injustices, but there is very little hard evidence that they have that effect. In other related issues the helplessness of the poor, particularly the blacks, is repeatedly invoked to defeat proposed reforms that would enable these people to make their own decisions and eliminate the "caretaker" approach of most programs. As it is, history has proven that blacks have made substantial gains in education, income, employment and housing. These gains have been made primarily through individual effort and in spite of the usually self-serving "crusades" of middle class liberals. (Author/EB)

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A Black Scholar Speaks for the "Angry Moderates"

Thomas Sowell

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AUG 7 1978

Dissenting from Liberal Orthodoxy

Thomas Sowell

Being a black "conservative" is perhaps not considered as bizarre as being a transvestite, but it is certainly considered more strange than being a vegetarian or a bird watcher. Recently a network television program contacted me because they had an episode coming up that included a black conservative as one of the characters, and they wanted me to come down to the studio so that their writers and actors could observe such an exotic being in the flesh.

Am I a black conservative? It is hard enough to know what a "liberal" or a "conservative" is, without the additional racial modifications. Supposedly a "conservative" is satisfied with the status quo, but in more than forty years of listening to people, ranging from welfare recipients to the President of the United States, I have never come across this mythical being who is satisfied with the status quo. I know of no statistical research, or even casual observations, that would lead to the conclusion that so-called "conservatives" are more content, complacent or less outraged than people who carry the label "liberal." Some of the angriest people I know are called "moderates." Since truth-in-labeling laws do not apply to politics, there is little that can be done about all this.

Once it is realized that "liberal" and "conservative" are simply arbitrary designations for opposing political teams (more elegant but no more meaningful than "Dodgers" and "Mets"), we can turn to the substance of the issues between them. From this point of view, a so-called "conservative" is nothing more than a dissenter from the prevailing liberal orthodoxy. A "radical" would simply be someone who carries the liberal orthodoxy to further extremes.

Why would a black man dissent from the prevailing liberal orthodoxy, and especially on such racial issues as busing, "affirmative

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Thomas Sowell is a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, California, an adjunct scholar of the American Enterprise Institute, and the author of *Race and Economics* (1975).

action" and the like? The question itself shows how pervasively the mass media have stereotyped and filtered the news. Most black people oppose busing. Polls that showed a black majority in favor of busing a few years ago have begun to show black pluralities and, finally, an absolute majority of blacks against busing. What is rare is to see any black opponent of busing in the media. The media-created black "spokesman" usually shares media-created values. The impression is insinuated that such "spokesmen" represent the "grass roots," or "authentic" ghetto blacks, while black dissenters from the liberal orthodoxy are from a remote "middle class" fringe. This impression must be *insinuated,* because there is little *evidence* for it—and a tremendous amount of evidence to the contrary. Many of the most fiery "militants" are middle-class Negroes now trying to live down their past by being blacker-than-thou, like true converts.

When the Supreme Court struck down state-imposed segregation in 1954, the decision was justifiably hailed as the climax of a struggle of many decades against Jim Crow laws and gross discrimination in the availability of public services, including education as a crucial necessity. Two more decades of bad faith, foot dragging and evasions produced ever tighter judicial control, culminating in court-ordered busing to achieve racial "balance." In short, we have arrived at a position that was not implicit in the original decision, and in many ways goes counter to the original concern for insuring individual constitutional rights *without regard* to color or other group characteristics.

The prevailing liberal orthodoxy insists that busing is essential for black children to receive their constitutional rights—and that they are to have their rights if it kills them. King Solomon is said to have chosen the true mother of a disputed infant by asking the two women concerned whether each would agree to having the baby cut in half to satisfy their rival claims. It was perhaps the first confrontation between principles of humanity and statistical "balance." Fortunately, King Solomon did not rely on HEW guidelines for a solution.

Remarkably little attention has been paid to the black children who are supposed to benefit from busing. Certainly, little attention has been paid to the facts about their educational or psychological well-being before or after court-ordered "integration." It was assumed from the outset in 1954 that separate schools are inherently inferior. Anyone familiar with the history of numerous all-Jewish or all-Oriental schools could have exposed this for the sheer nonsense it was, and there are also a number of all-black schools that would have

exposed this fallacy. All-black Dunbar High School in Washington had an average I.Q. of 111 in 1939, compared with the national average of 100—and this fifteen years before sociological stereotypes were enshrined as the "law of the land."

The really crucial assumption behind involuntary busing is that some tangible benefit will result—presumably to black children, but, one would hope, to white children as well, and to the cause of racial understanding and mutual respect. The hard evidence does not support any of these assumptions. One can select isolated pieces of data to support the assumptions, but at least as much evidence can be found showing declining academic performances, lower self-esteem by black children and greater racial antagonism on the part of both black and white children after busing is imposed.

Busing is not a policy but a crusade. For a policy, one can ask, "Does it work?" "At what cost?" "What is the human impact?" For a crusade, the relevant questions are: "Whose side are you on?" "Is your courage failing?" "Can we dishonor the sacrifices of those who went before by turning back now?" The last thing a crusader wants to hear is cost-benefit analysis. And if the crusader is a white liberal whose own children are in private schools, his courage knows no bounds.

One of the last refuges of those who admit the sorry academic and social record of involuntary busing is the so-called "hostage" theory of integration. According to this view, the only chance black children have for getting a fair share of educational resources is to be mixed in with white children, so that discrimination is thwarted. This assumes that it is easier for courts to control racial "balance"—in the face of "white flight"—than to control dollars and cents paid from a central fund. It also assumes a greater educational effect from differences in per-pupil expenditures than existing studies substantiate.

Finally, there is the simple vested interest of civil-rights lawyers and leaders who have a heavy personal stake in pursuing the courses of action that brought them success and prominence in the past. There is nothing peculiar in this. It is, in fact, all too human. Generals have long been known for fighting the last war. In view of history, it may be too much to expect any organization to stop on a dime and then head off in another direction in high gear. But it is not too much to expect the rest of us to be able to see when a given approach has made its contribution, served its purpose and become counterproductive. We certainly need not repeat the mistake of Vietnam by sacrificing the younger generation to spare leaders the embarrassment of losing face.

The question may once have been "segregation" versus "integration" but it is that no longer. Neither federal, state nor local government may segregate any longer. "Racial balance," however, is in most cases a will-o'-the-wisp, as changing neighborhoods, private schools and exodus to the suburbs repeatedly defeat the numerical goals of busing. In some cases, there is more racial separation in the classroom after years of busing than before. As for "integration" in some more meaningful social and psychological sense, going beyond racial body count, compulsory transportation is the least likely process for achieving that goal. It is a tragic commentary on the liberals' misunderstanding of their fellow human beings that they cannot grasp the difference between the effects of voluntary interracial association and involuntary placement in the same buildings. It is true that, prior to the 1954 Supreme Court decision, much evidence showed greater tolerance and better educational results for black children when going to schools—usually neighborhood schools—with white youngsters. But these were black and white schoolchildren who *chose* to live and go to school in the same neighborhood, and who grew up around one another—not strangers confronting strangers in an atmosphere of compulsion, anxiety and heightened racial defensiveness.

The grand delusion of contemporary liberals is that they have both the right and the ability to move their fellow creatures around like blocks of wood—and that the end results will be no different than if people had voluntarily chosen the same actions. It is essentially a denial of other people's humanity. It is a healthy sign that those assigned these subhuman roles have bitterly resented it, though it may ultimately prove a social and political catastrophe if their anger at judicial and bureaucratic heavy-handedness finds a target in blacks as scapegoats.

The same statistical approach to human problems found in the busing controversy is applied to the labor market in the federal "affirmative action" program. There is also the same heavy reliance on assumptions, the same disregard of facts and the same crusading assurance that whatever one does in a noble cause is right.

One of the first things that is done in many noble causes is lying. "Affirmative action" is no exception. The racial, ethnic and sex quotas that are set under "affirmative-action" hiring are denied by calling them "goals" and attempting to make elaborate scholastic distinctions between the two. We are told that "goals" are not "really" quotas because goals are flexible while quotas are rigid. But this revision of the English language ignores both facts and usage. "Quota" is

no new or exotic word the liberal missionaries must explain to the heathen. There are immigration quotas, import quotas, production quotas and all kinds of other quotas—and whether those quotas happen to be met or not during a particular time period, no one denies that they are quotas. Quotas are quantitative rather than qualitative criteria. Everybody knows that, and that is precisely what critics object to.

"Affirmative action" quotas are supposed to compensate minorities and women for past injustices, but before any benefit can compensate anybody for anything, it must first be a benefit! There is very little hard evidence that "affirmative action" has that net effect, just as there is very little hard evidence that busing benefits black schoolchildren. Black income as a percentage of white income reached its peak in 1970—the year before mandatory quotas ("goals and timetables") were established—and has been below that level ever since (due largely to the recession). In short, blacks achieved the economic advances of the 1960s once the worst forms of discrimination were outlawed, and the only additional effect of quotas was to undermine the legitimacy of black achievements by making them look like gifts from the government.

Undoubtedly, here and there some individuals have gotten jobs they would never have been eligible for otherwise. But however striking such examples might be, the overall picture depends on two other factors—what proportion of the labor force such people constitute, and the extent to which "affirmative action" has the offsetting consequence of actually reducing job opportunities for minority or female applicants. Since quotas apply not only to hiring but also to pay and promotion, some employers choose to avoid later problems by minimizing the initial hiring of nonwhite or female applicants. This is particularly true where there is a substantial risk that any applicant—of whatever race or sex—may have to be let go later on. For example, in the academic world, the "up-or-out" promotion system means that the top universities are constantly firing many junior faculty members at the end of their contracts, without any explicit "fault" being alleged. The legal and political dangers in applying this policy to minorities and women give universities an incentive either to avoid hiring minorities and women or to sidetrack them into special administrative jobs where this policy does not apply. Other industries also create "special" or "token" jobs for similar reasons, with the same net effect of reducing the career prospects of minorities and women—as a result of government pressures designed to have the opposite effect.

Despite a tendency to consider women as a "minority," both the history and the present situation of women are quite different. Contrary to a fictitious history about having come a long way, baby, women today have less representation in many high-level positions than thirty or forty years ago. In earlier times, women made up a higher proportion of doctors, academics, people in *Who's Who*, and in professional, technical and managerial positions generally. If you plot on a graph the proportion of women in high-level jobs over the past several decades, and on a parallel graph the number of babies per woman, you will see almost an exact mirror image. That is, as women got married earlier and earlier and had more and more babies, their careers declined. In recent times, as the "baby boom" passed and both marriage rates and childbearing declined, women have started moving back up the occupational ladder relative to men—though in many cases not yet achieving the relative position they held in the 1930s. This upturn was apparent before "affirmative action" quotas.

If you go beyond the sweeping comparisons of "men and women" that are so popular, it is clear that marriage and childbearing have more to do with women's career prospects than employer discrimination. In 1970—before mandatory "goals and timetables"—single women in their thirties who had worked continuously since high school averaged higher earnings than single men in their thirties who had worked continuously since high school. In the academic world, single women with Ph.D.'s achieved the rank of full professor more often than single men who received their Ph.D.'s at the same time—and this again, before quotas.

These are among the many facts ignored by proponents of "affirmative action." Such facts are relevant to policy but they do not support a crusade, which requires an identifiable enemy, such as male chauvinist employers. A much stronger case can be made that career women are discriminated against in the home, where they are expected to carry most of the domestic burdens, regardless of their jobs. But there is no crusade to mount, and no political mileage to be made, from advising women to go home and tell their husbands to shape up. Both messiahs and politicians have to be able to promise people something, and very often that involves misstating the original problem, in order to make the promise sound plausible.

The grand assumption that body count proves discrimination proceeds as if people would be evenly distributed in the absence of deliberate barriers. There isn't a speck of evidence for this assumption, and there is a mountain of evidence against it. Even in activities

wholly within each individual's control, people are not evenly distributed: The choices made as to what television programs to watch, what games to play, what songs to listen to, what candidates to vote for, all show the enormous impact of social, cultural, religious and other factors. One-fourth of the professional hockey players in the United States come from one state;* more than a quarter of all American Nobel prize winners are Jewish; more than half of all professional basketball stars are black. Can one state discriminate against the other forty-nine? Can Jews stop Gentiles from getting Nobel prizes, or blacks keep whites out of basketball? Obviously there are reasons of climate, tradition and interest that cause some groups' attention to be drawn strongly toward some activities, and that of other groups toward other activities. It need not even involve "ability." Some groups that have been tremendously successful in some activities have been utter failures in other activities requiring no more talent. Even such an economically successful urban group as American Jews had an unbroken string of financial disasters in farming, while immigrants from a peasant background succeeded, even though peasant immigrants could not begin to match the Jews' performance in an urban setting. As a noted historian once said, "We do not live in the past, but the past in us."

It takes no imagination at all to see the heavy weight of the past among both minorities and women. Even those minority and female individuals who are able to take advantage of higher educational opportunities do not specialize in the same fields as others, but disproportionately choose such fields as education and the humanities—where most people are poorly paid, regardless of sex or race. There are good historical explanations for such choices, but these are not necessarily good economic reasons. However, unless we are prepared to deny free choice to the supposed beneficiaries of "affirmative action," it is arbitrary social dogma to expect an even distribution of results.

Should we do nothing? That is the bogeyman of unbridled discrimination that "affirmative-action" spokesmen try to scare us with. But we were not doing "nothing" before quotas came in. The decade of the 1960s saw some of the strongest antidiscrimination laws passed anywhere, backed up by changing public opinion and by a new awareness and militancy among minorities and women. The dramatic improvement in the economic position of blacks was just one fruit of these developments. Despite the tendency of "affirmative ac-

*Minnesota.

tion" proponents to conjure up images of discrimination in decades past, the question is, what existed just before the quotas, and what has happened since? That is the relevant question, and the answer shows a mountain laboring to bring forth a mouse—and often not succeeding. As we have seen, the ratio of black income to white income has never been as high since mandatory quotas as it was just before such "goals and timetables."

Why is "affirmative action" so ineffective, despite all the furor it stirs up? Simply because its shotgun statistical approach hits the just and the unjust alike. Just as the crime does not consist of demonstrable discrimination against someone, but of a failure to meet governmental preconceptions, so the punishment does not usually consist of penalties imposed at the end of some adjudicatory process but of having to go through the process itself. For example, the University of Michigan had to spend $350,000 just to collect statistics for "affirmative action." For all practical purposes, that is the same as being assessed a $350,000 fine without either a charge or proof of anything. Most "affirmative action" proceedings do not end up in proof of guilt or innocence, or in any penalty, though many end up settled by "peace with honor" in the form of elaborate plans with good intentions spelled out in statistical detail: 1.3 more black accountants per year, 2.7 more female chemists, etc. If King Solomon had operated under "affirmative action," he would have *promised* each woman 0.5 children, and gone back to business as usual.

It has long been known that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and that is where they lead in this case. And since many of the quotas were virtually impossible of achievement from the outset, there is even less reason than usual to expect much from such statements under such pressures. Just as in television the medium is the message, so under "affirmative action" the process is the penalty. And since this penalty falls on the guilty and the innocent alike, it provides no reason for even the worst bigot to change. Nor will it exempt even the purest heart from the harassments of bureaucrats. Indiscriminate penalties do not produce change but only resentment. As in the case of busing, resentment against government heavy-handedness is often misplaced as hostility to the supposed beneficiaries. The fact that there is really very little benefit to any group only completes this tragic farce.

One of the reasons why many programs that don't work still keep going strong is that they sound so noble. Moreover, championing the disadvantaged is not only an inspiration but an occupation. To be blunt, the poor are a gold mine. By the time they are studied,

advised, experimented with and administered, the poor have helped many a middle-class liberal to achieve affluence with government money. The total amount of money the government spends on its many "antipoverty" efforts is three times what would be required to lift every man, woman and child in America above the official poverty line by simply sending money to the poor. Obviously, there are a lot of middlemen who get theirs: administrators, researchers, consultants, staffers, etc. These are the army of people who "take care" of the poor in a variety of ways. Such caretakers are the modern equivalent of the missionaries who came to do good and stayed to do well. It is no accident that the highest income counties in the United States are in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Poverty is the cause of much of that affluence.

Central to the costly "caretaker" approach to helping the poor—by paying money to someone else—is an image of the poor as too helpless to make it with mere money. A picture is said to be worth a thousand words, but this particular image is worth billions of dollars to the caretaker class. Public resentment at the tax cost of the "antipoverty" establishment takes the form of disenchantment with the poor and minorities, though most of the money ends up in the pockets of people who are neither.

Like every army, the army of caretakers requires both material and moral support. The taxpayers supply the material support. The moral support comes from those who accept the image of the helpless poor and who project that image—and the corresponding "need" for caretakers—through the mass media, in the colleges, and to a captive audience of millions in "social studies" in the public schools. Since many who project such an image are themselves products of years of the same kind of sociopolitical conditioning, something very close to perpetual motion has been created.

The image of the helplessness of the poor is repeatedly invoked to defeat proposals for income maintenance, educational vouchers and any other reforms that would enable the poor to make their own decisions and eliminate the caretakers. How helpless are the poor? And—since I am speaking as a *black* "conservative"—specifically, how helpless are blacks?

History shows that one of the most massive internal migrations in this country has been the movement of millions of blacks out of the South in the last two generations, in order to seek a better life for themselves. This was a spontaneous decision of millions of individuals, *not* organized by indigenous "leaders" nor promoted by outside caretakers. Going even further back in history, to 1850, the

census of that year showed that most of the half-million "free persons of color" were literate, despite (1) being denied access to public schools in most parts of the country, (2) being forbidden by law to go to *any* schools in many southern states, and (3) having very low incomes and occupations and few opportunities to cash in on the education. Private and even clandestine schools for blacks existed all over the United States in 1850, most of them supported by blacks themselves out of meager incomes. Today, many ghetto blacks in cities across the country are sending their children to Catholic schools—though the blacks in question are usually Protestants—in order to seek better education than the public schools provide. For example, it has been estimated that more than 10 percent of all black children in Chicago go to Catholic schools. If educational vouchers were to make education free at both private and public institutions, would black parents be too helpless to make a choice among the various schools available to them? Or is the real problem that many caretakers in the educational bureaucracies would find themselves out of a job?

At a time when every silly trend in education is proclaimed in the media as an "innovation," the struggle of thousands of poor black families to send their children to private schools is a nonevent for those who shape public opinion. Where these private schools are Catholic, they are often in ghetto neighborhoods abandoned by earlier Catholic immigrant minorities, and it is not uncommon today for the bulk of the student body in these schools to be non-Catholic. Some of the Catholic schools have achieved remarkable educational success with black students, at far lower cost per pupil than the public schools. But it isn't news.

Indeed, black advancement in general isn't news. The research team of Scammon and Wattenberg was roundly denounced in the media when it reported very substantial gains of blacks across a broad front, in education, income, occupation and housing in the decade of the 1960s. In olden times, messengers were sometimes killed for bringing bad news to the king. Today those who bring good news are in jeopardy, for they are threatening the whole caretaker industry and undermining an image supported by the caretakers' allies in the media and in politics.

How unusual is a so-called "black conservative"? Not very. Being an exception to a media image is not being an exception in real life. The real opinions of flesh-and-blood black people have repeatedly been found to be completely different from the "black" opinions of media-selected "spokesmen."

An *Ebony* magazine poll comparing the views of blacks with those of college students found blacks consistently more "conservative" than the college students. The great majority of blacks considered this country worth defending against foreign enemies and rejected violence as a means of achieving social change. A Gallup poll found that a substantial majority of blacks regard the courts as too lenient on criminals. Still another survey found that more than three-quarters of the blacks describe themselves as "sick and tired" of hearing attacks on "traditional American values."

So being a black "conservative" is not quite as distinctive as it might seem.

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Redistribution and the Welfare System
Edgar K. Browning. $3.00

According to Browning, the present welfare system transferred nearly $80 billion (cash and in-kind) to the poorest fourth of the population in 1973, more than triple the net transfer in 1966. Yet the number of persons counted as poor in 1973 was only 19 percent fewer than in 1966. Browning finds a simple explanation for this paradox: official poverty statistics measure only money incomes. If in-kind transfers, such as food stamps, public housing, medicare and medicaid are counted, the author estimates, the average income of "officially poor" families was actually 30 percent above their average poverty line in 1973. The author concludes that a single cash transfer program like the negative income tax would be more equitable and more efficient than the present welfare system of more than 100 separate programs. He also cautions that there is little scope for additional redistribution unless Americans are prepared to impose effective marginal tax rates in excess of 50 percent on all families, poor and nonpoor alike.

Affirmative Action Reconsidered: Was It Necessary in Academia?
Thomas Sowell. $3.00

Sowell shows that the administration of affirmative action programs has run counter to the intent of Congress in passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Examining salary differentials for blacks and whites with comparable training and credentials within the numerous academic areas of specialization, he finds that salaries of black academics equalled or surpassed those of white academics both before the application of numerical "goals and timetables" in 1971 and four years after. A similarly careful analysis of male-female salary differentials finds no support for the contention that male-female career differences are the result of employer discrimination.